

How can a well-designed R.A.F.T.S. prompt promote focus and excitement from a student writer?

R.A.F.T.S. are assignments to assign when you've planned larger amounts of time in class to let students compose and talk to each other about what they're composing. R.A.F.T.S. are assignments that should challenge students to explore the depth of thinking they have about your content.

The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges notes, "If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write." (Shellard & Protheroe, 2004). R.A.F.T.S. do this by challenging students to write to an audience (imaginary or real) other than their teacher and from a perspective (imaginary or real) other than their own.

When writing to a R.A.F.T.S. prompt in any content area, students must access higher level thinking in order to respond. This process, if the assignment is designed well, will not allow the regurgitated information that other types of assigned writing often do. While most writing assignments ask students to simply report on information they've learned, R.A.F.T.S. ask students to shift perspective in order to show their knowledge on a topic.

Let's contrast a traditional writing assignment with a R.A.F.T.S. assignment. Let's say you are taking a college class and the professor asks *you* (your Role) to write a traditional paper about *effective group work strategies for ELL students* (your Topic), you would most likely write a *standard report* (your Format) that *explained* (your Strong verb) to your *professor* (your Audience) situations from your current classroom, your past experiences, and any research you have looked over.

But imagine the assignment was as follows:

Here's your writing assignment:

You are an English Language Learner in a classroom at the school where you work. You have been inspired to (with an aide's assistance, if necessary) compose a letter to the editor of the local paper. The letter must convince the literate public that traditional group work doesn't always help ELLs feel safe in a classroom. Before writing a draft, go through this quick re-cap:

What's your **Role**: _____

What's your **Audience**: _____

What's your **Format**: _____

What's your **Topic**: _____

What's your **Strong verb**: _____

What do you do as a student to even write to this prompt? What would you have to know to get started? Why would the professor want students to write in this way rather than a traditional report? Wouldn't taking a quiz be just as indicative of learning? Is writing in this format (as opposed to a traditional report) more or less likely to generate student discussion?

Our students often feel confused about a teacher's expectations when it comes to writing assignments. R.A.F.T.S. prompts help clarify a writing assignment's expectations and gets your students engaged in a completely different way.

Objective assessments are definitely a faster and easier way to find out what students know, and they have their place. However, when students are assessed in a more meaningful way, the learning that takes place has staying power. Students will remember what they wrote, how they expressed their understanding, the purpose of the assignment, and where they might use this knowledge in the “real world.” Using R.A.F.T.S. prompts *and* the writing generated by them will give your students the keys to accessing the door to higher thinking.

What important topics are you teaching in the next month that might be enhanced by requiring a R.A.F.T.S. writing assignment from your students?

More Examples of RAFT Assignments Science

| Role | Audience | Format | Topic | Strong Verbs |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Illustrator | Third graders | Comic strip | Saying no to drugs | Remind, warn, persuade, tell, urge |
| Dietician | Family | Menu | A day's meals | Announce, consume, digest |
| Organ or body system | Your host | Letter | How you work and why you are important | Communicate, explain, inform, remind |
| Drop of water | Fourth grader | Diary | Water cycle | Evaporate, condense, precipitate |
| Poisonous animal | Fourth graders | Persuasive paragraph, or letter | Why you want to be left alone | Avoid, consider, inform, explain, remind, warn, urge, annoy |
| Weather forecaster | Picnickers | Oral weather report | Weather | Predict, precipitate |
| Vet | Child | Instruction sheet | How to care for a hamster | Care |
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Social Studies

| Role | Audience | Format | Topic | Strong Verbs |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Song writer | Tim and Jeb | Song | Cowboys on a cattle drive | Travel, tell |
| Magazine writer | New students | Magazine | Welcome to our school | Introduce, announce, tell |
| Travel agent | Student travelers | Travel brochures | Social studies | Charm, describe, immortalize, visualize |
| Leprechaun | First grader | Speech bubble | How to find a pot of gold | Tell, show |
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Language / Reading

| Role | Audience | Format | Topic | Strong Verbs |
|----------|-----------------|--------|---|--|
| Yourself | Someone special | Poem | Friendship why the person is special | Divulge, inform, reflect, relate, reiterate |
| The moon | The cow | Letter | Persuade the cow that she cannot jump over the moon | Convince, consider, explain, warn, tell, annoy |
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James and the Giant Peach

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|----------|------------|----------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Audience | Art critic | Portrait | Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker | Describe, characterize |
|----------|------------|----------|-----------------------------|------------------------|

The One Hundred Dresses

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|-------|-------|--------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Peggy | Wanda | Letter | Apologize for teasing | Apologize |
|-------|-------|--------|-----------------------|-----------|

Frindle

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|-----------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Advertising executive | Consumers | Advertisement | An ad campaign for Frindles | Consider, convince, search, amaze, compare |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------------|--|

Amelia Bedelia

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|------|--------|----------------|---------------|------|
| Boss | Amelia | List of chores | What to clean | Tell |
|------|--------|----------------|---------------|------|

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Math

| Role | Audience | Format | Topic | Strong Verbs |
|-----------|--|----------------------|-----------|--|
| Shoemaker | Cinderella Bigfoot (from book <i>Cinderella Bigfoot</i>) | Blueprint for a shoe | Shoe size | Measure, estimate, evaluate, mold, fit |
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Other Subjects

| Role | Audience | Format | Topic | Strong Verbs |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Speaker | Classmates | Speech | Will vary | Depends on speech topic |
| Sculptor | Artists | Relief sculpture | Nature (or whatever else you are studying) | Describe (title/caption) |
| Rapper | Peers | Song | River pollution | Condemning |
| Catfish | Industry | Editorial | Clean water | Demanding |
| “Ole Man River” | Boaters | Sermon | Dumping cans in the river | Condemning |
| Eagle | Mother Nature | Essay | Quality of the diet provided by the river | Lamenting |
| Spirit of a deceased Indian | Future citizens | Chant | Desecration of the ancient Indian burial grounds | Decrying |
| Student | Younger children | Play | Hunting | Explain |
| Fish | Magazine readers | Article for <i>Field and Stream</i> | Influence of a factory along the river | Describe |
| Screenwriter | General public | Movie/ screenplay | | |
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RAFTS

Generate a list of RAFTS assignments you might use with your students.

| Role | Audience | Format | Topic | Strong Verbs |
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Social Studies R.A.F.T.S.

| Role | Audience | Format | Topic | Strong Verbs |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|---|---------------------|
| Sacajawea | Jean Baptiste | Letter | Our travels with Lewis and Clark | Describe |
| Newspaper reporter | Readers in 1851 | News report | Native Americans sign treaty at Ft. Laramie | Announce |
| Bird | Wright Brothers | Letter | New invention disrupts skies | Complain |
| Kaiser Wilhelm II | European head of state | recipe | How we can start a world war | Detailing |
| 21 st -century American | James Madison | Letter | The constitution | Expressing thanks |
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Writing Fix www.writingfix.com
Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) using R.A.F.T.S

Writing Fix is a fantastic online source that combines resources for both 6-Trait Writing and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). It is sponsored by the Northern Nevada Writing Project and the National Writing Project.

Here are some examples of R.A.F.T.S. writing assignments created using Writing Fix's online tool for creating R.A.F.T.S. assignments. You can create your own by going to Module 5: R.A.F.T.S. Assignments at this web address: http://www.writingfix.com/Writing_Across_Curriculum.htm

Social Studies Example:

Role: a historian

Audience: a senate committee

Format: a three-minute speech

Topic: a current war

Strong verb: inspire

You are a historian with strong opinions about how the current war is similar to a past war that we should have learned from but apparently have not. Because of your expertise, you have been asked to answer questions in front of a Senate hearing committee that will determine if more government funding is provided to support the current war. Before answering any questions, you have been asked to read a three-minute statement that introduces your passion to this topic. Write your three-minute statement so that it inspires the committee to reconsider how the funding will be apportioned.

Science Example

Role: a science professor

Audience: a senate committee

Format: a three-minute speech

Topic: space exploration

Strong verb: inspire

You are a scientist with strong opinions about the lack of progress of our space exploration program. Because of your expertise, you have been asked to answer questions in front of a Senate hearing committee that will determine if additional government funding is provided to jumpstart a manned mission to Mars. Before answering any questions, you have been asked to read a three-minute statement that introduces your passion to this topic. Write your three-minute statement so that it inspires the committee to provide you with hundreds of millions of dollars to fund this change.

Math Example:

Role: a math professor

Audience: a senate committee

Format: a three-minute speech

Topic: using decimals

Strong verb: inspire

You are a mathematician with strong opinions about students not learning their decimals early enough. Because of your expertise, you have been asked to answer questions in front of a Senate hearing committee that will determine if government funding is provided for a change to the educational system. Before answering any questions, you have been asked to read a three-minute statement that introduces your passion to this topic. Write your three-minute statement so that it inspires the committee to provide you with millions of dollars to fund this change.

Strong Verbs for R.A.F.T.S. Writing Assignments

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|-------------|------------------|--------------|
| align | specify | summarize |
| annotate | suppress | tell |
| apply | understand | urge |
| brainstorm | warn | winnow |
| cancel | amaze | analyze |
| carve | announce | annoy |
| charge | assess | assimilate |
| coalesce | browse | cajole |
| communicate | capitulate | capture |
| connect | censor | characterize |
| consider | charm | clarify |
| construct | collapse | combine |
| contest | compare | contemplate |
| create | connive | count |
| decipher | consolidate | critique |
| delineate | consume | define |
| diagnose | decorate | design |
| divulge | describe | elucidate |
| embellish | digest | encourage |
| engrave | edit | exemplify |
| explain | empathize | fold |
| harmonize | eradicate | illuminate |
| imagine | express yourself | improvise |
| inform | identify | melt |
| investigate | immortalize | modify |
| memorize | inspect | orchestrate |
| mold | link | peruse |
| participate | metamorphasize | ponder |
| photograph | navigate | reconcile |
| quote | persuade | record |
| reconstruct | plagiarize | reject |
| reflect | recapitulate | remark |
| relate | regurgitate | review |
| remind | remunerate | scrutinize |
| rhyme | script | shrivel |
| search | separate | trigger |
| shave | shrink | visualize |